



Representation in State Legislaturesⁱ

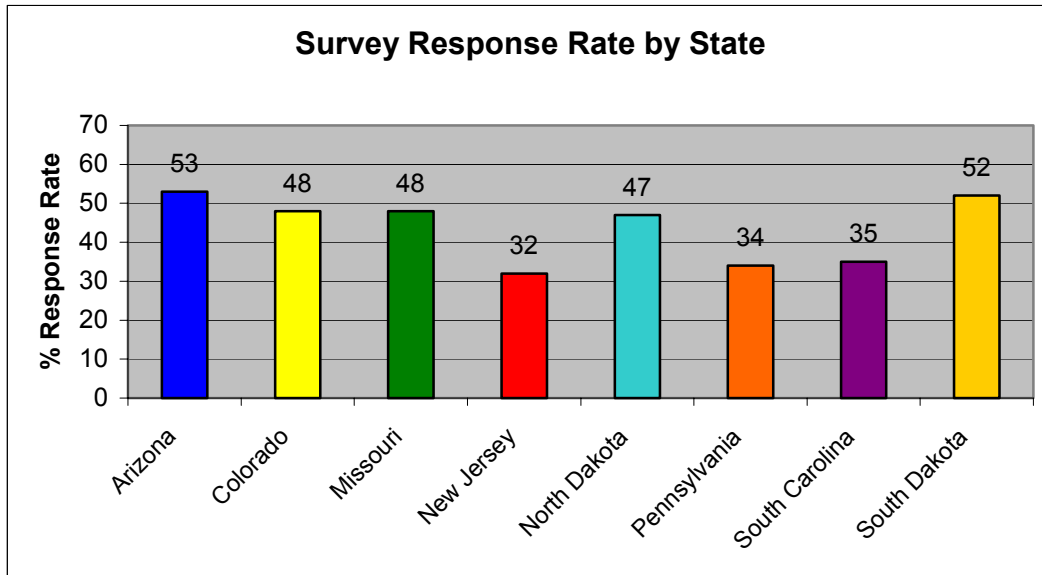
By Lilliard Richardsonⁱⁱ

In Summer 2003, the Institute of Public Policy conducted a mail survey of state legislators to determine how legislators feel about constituency service and the use of technology, whether they believe email has a positive effect on communication, whom they contact via email and the impact of the internet on the legislature. The states that were surveyed were chosen based on a number of legislative features including multi-member districts (MMDs) versus single member districts (SMDs) and term limits. Arizona, New Jersey, North Dakota, and South Dakota are all MMDs for the lower level chambers and single member district SMDs for the upper level chamber while Colorado, Missouri, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina are entirely SMDs. Of these states, Arizona, South Dakota, Colorado and Missouri currently have term limits in place.



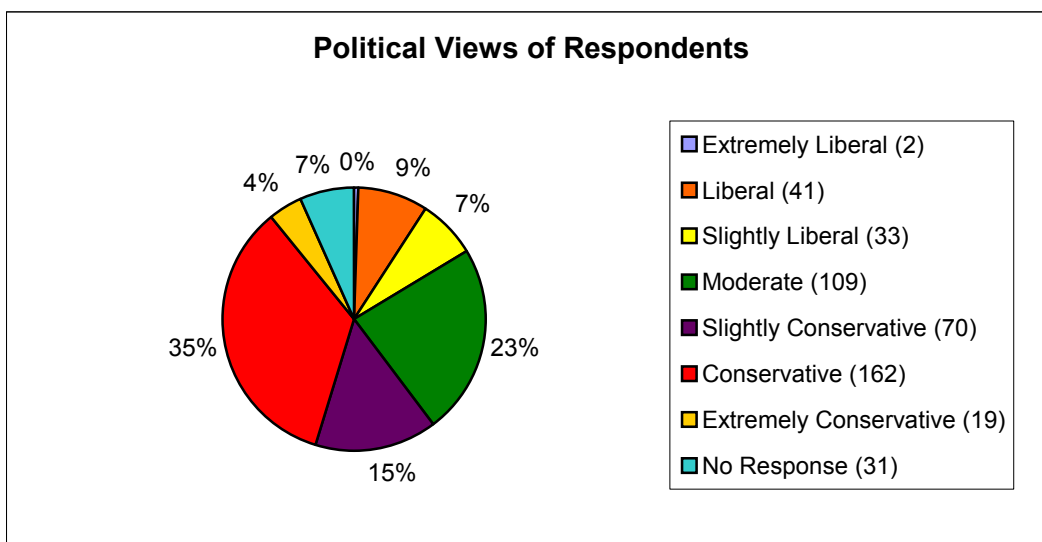
Response Rate

The sixteen chambers include 1176 legislators with an overall response rate of 42%. The response rate varied by state with New Jersey at the low end with 32%, followed by Pennsylvania with 34%, South Carolina with 35%, North Dakota with 47%, Missouri with 48%, Colorado with 48%, South Dakota with 52%, and Arizona with 53%. The average age of the respondents was 54 with 36% classified as a freshman in the legislative chamber.



Political Views of Respondents

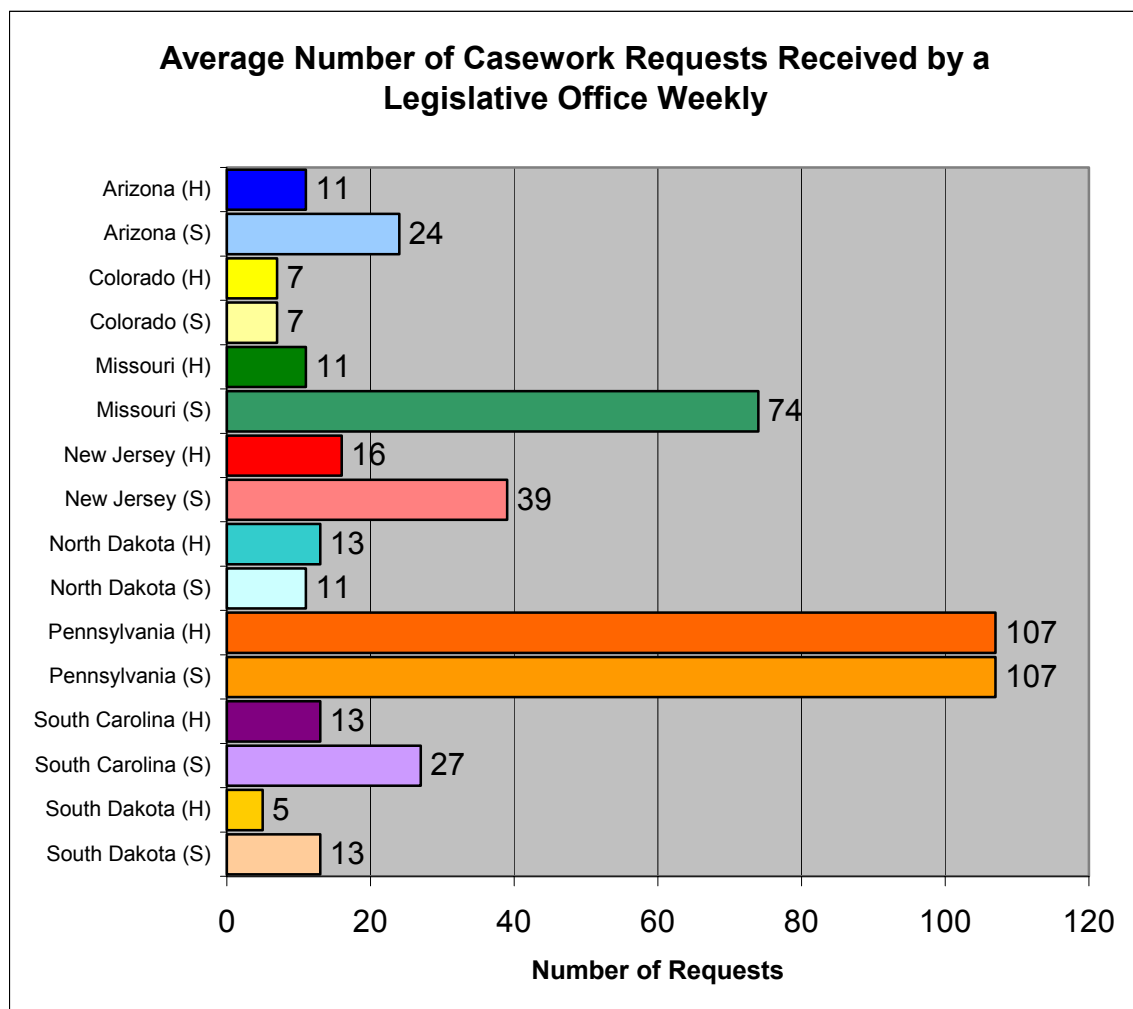
The legislators were asked about their political views. Of the respondents 16% described their views as liberal (extremely liberal, liberal or slightly liberal), 23% as moderate and 54% as conservative (extremely conservative, conservative, or slightly conservative). Of the respondents, 58% represent the Republican Party and 42% represent the Democratic Party.



() indicated the total number of responses for each category

Casework Requests

We found that the number of requests for casework a legislative office receives in an average week during session varied greatly by state. When looking at the averages of the House and Senate combined, Pennsylvania reported an average of 107 cases, which was more than four times that of any other state (North Dakota 24, South Carolina 17, Arizona 16, Missouri 15, New Jersey 12, South Dakota 8 and Colorado 7). The average number of casework requests reported by the House and Senate in the surveyed states is illustrated below in the table. In several states including Arizona, Missouri, New Jersey, South Carolina and South Dakota, the Senate reported a larger number of casework requests per week than the House. However in other states the requests are equal, such as the case in Colorado and Pennsylvania. In North Dakota the responses indicated that the House averages a larger number of casework requests per week than the Senate.

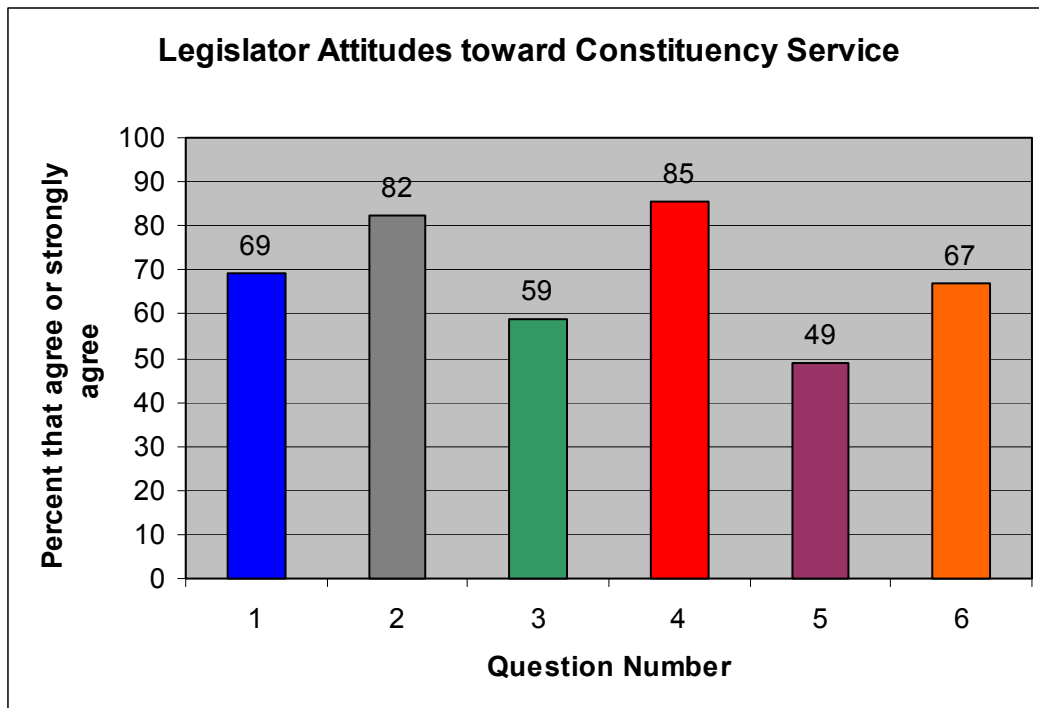


(H) Represents House

(S) Represents Senate

Constituency Service

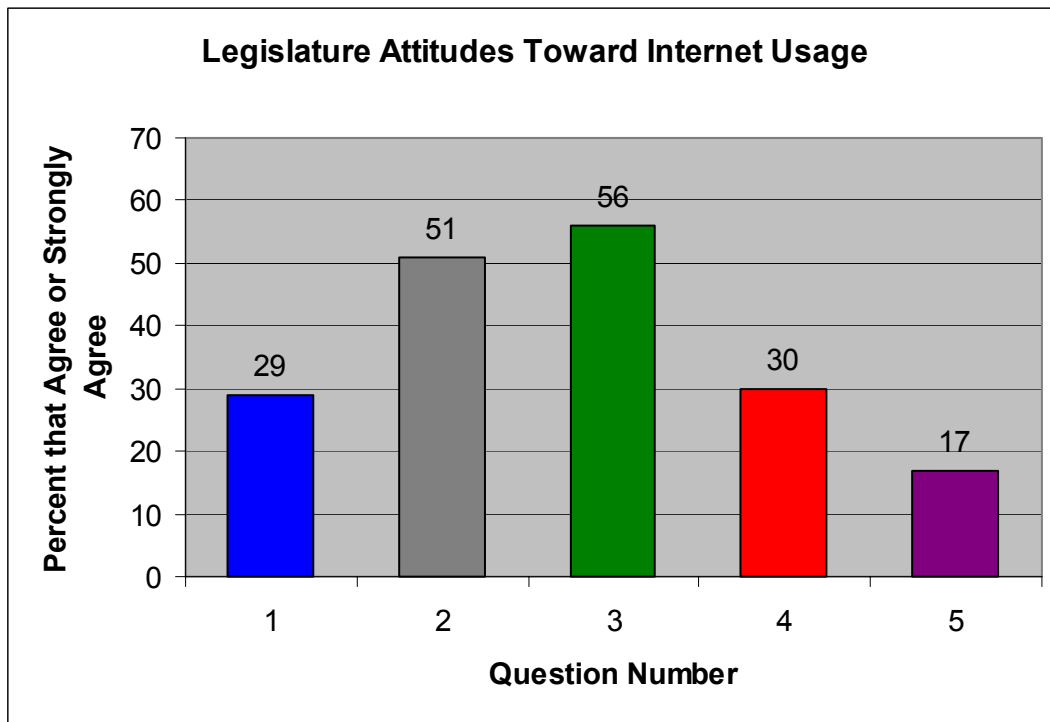
The following statements address the attitudes of the respondents about constituency service. The response categories included 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=not sure, 4=agree and 5=strongly agree. For the following table the responses for agree and strongly agree were combined to yield the percentages.



1. Constituency service is the most important thing I do.
2. Constituency service is an important method of maintaining electoral support.
3. Effective constituency service allows a legislator to take stands that may alienate some voters.
4. Constituency service is an important method of building trust with the public.
5. I put more emphasis on constituency service than the typical legislator in my state.
6. I would increase constituency service if I had more staff.

Internet Usage

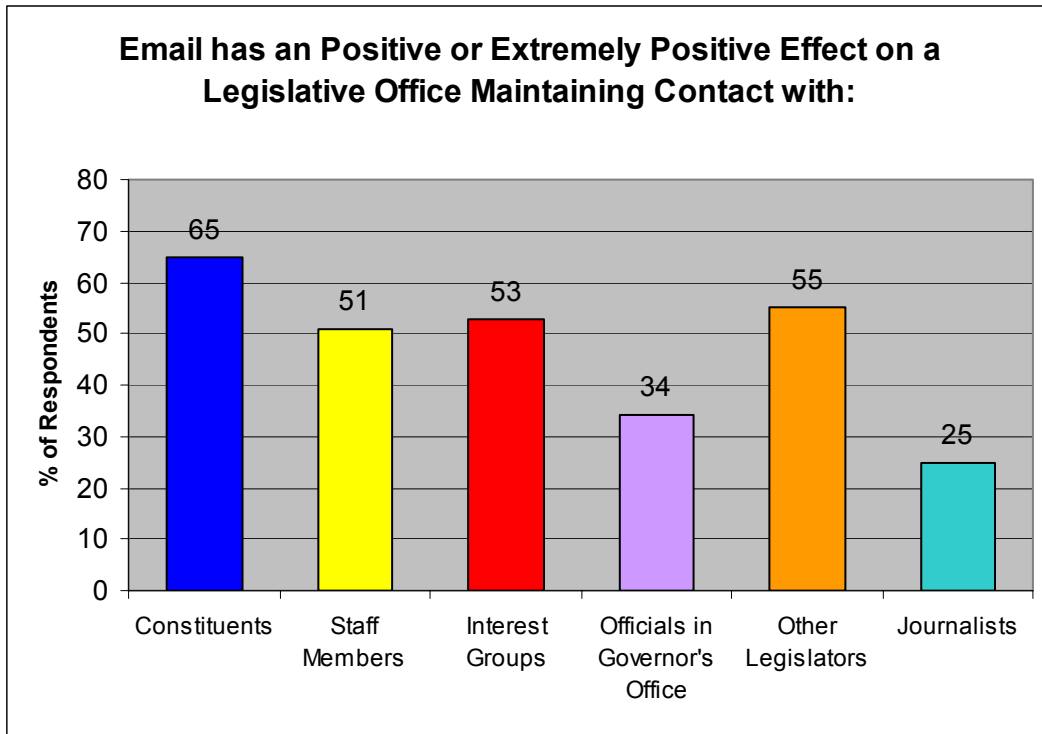
The following statements address the attitudes of the respondents about the usage of the internet. The response categories included 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=not sure, 4=agree and 5=strongly agree. For the following table the responses for agree and strongly agree were combined to yield the percentages.



1. Decreased demands on legislative staff to get current information.
2. Increased the pace of the legislative process.
3. Improved your ability to consider policy actions in other states.
4. Increased deliberation about legislative issues.
5. Caused staff to worry more about information being leaked prematurely or taken out of context.

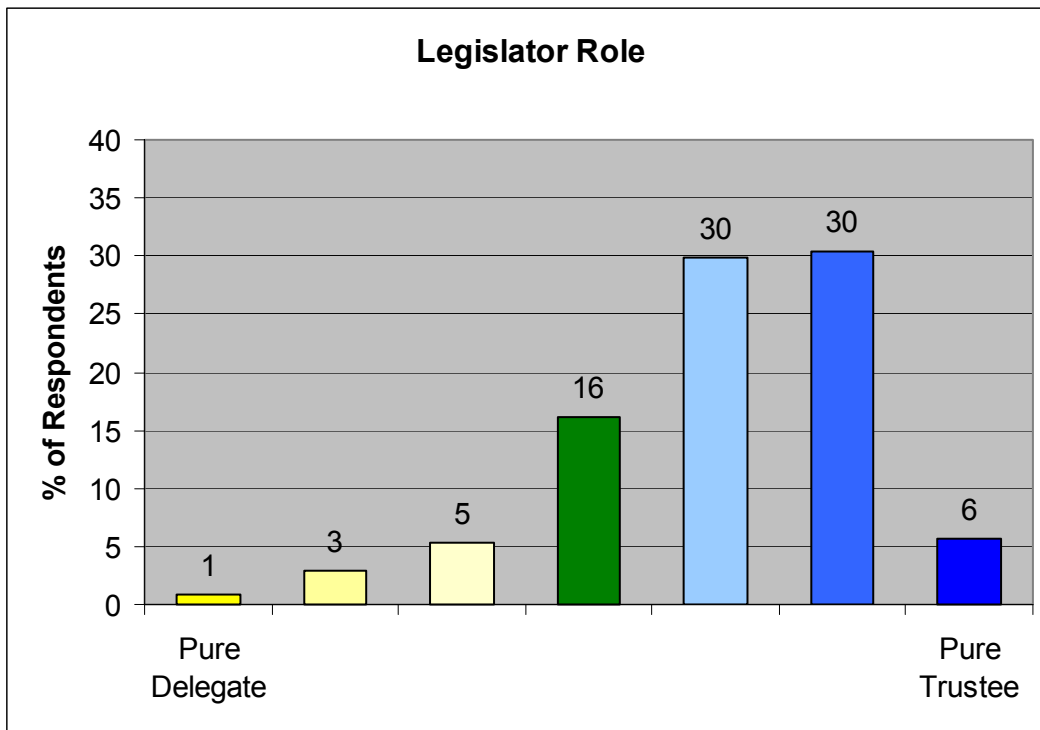
Email Preferences

Email can play an important role in communication. Below legislators rate their use of email to stay in contact with the various groups based on a response scale from 1 to 5, with 1=no positive impact at all and 5=extremely positive effects. A response value of 4 or 5 was utilized to produce the following table.



Legislator Role

The following table illustrates the respondent's position between a pure delegate and pure trustee. The possible response scale for the question was from 1 to 7, with 1=Pure Delegate and 7= Pure Trustee. A pure delegate is a legislator who votes solely based on the preferences of the voters that they represent. A pure trustee utilizes their own judgment to make decisions on the issues. There were 9% that did not respond to this question. Of the respondents 9% feel they represent a “delegate” (response categories 1, 2, and 3) in which they vote strictly on the preferences of the voters and 66% represent “trustee” (response categories 5, 6, and 7) where they use their own best interest to make decisions on issues.

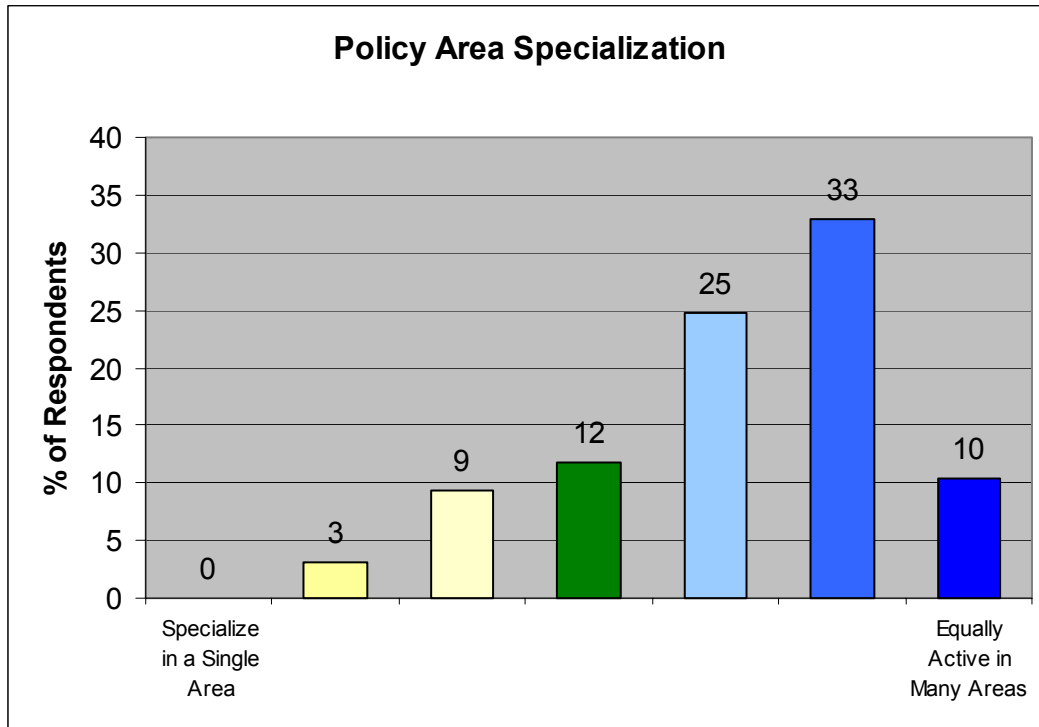


Pure Delegate – legislator who votes strictly on the preference of the voters

Pure Trustee – legislator who uses their own best judgment to decide on issues

Policy Specialization

A legislator can specialize on one specific issue or be equally active in a number of areas. A response scale of 1 to 7 was used for this question, 1=Specialize in a Single Area and 7= Equally Active in Many Areas. The chart below shows legislators' response to their policy specialization. When asked about their specialization, 21% stated they specialize in one policy area (response categories 1, 2, and 3) and 19% feel they are equally active in many different policy areas (response categories 5, 6, and 7). There were 8% that did not respond to this question.



ⁱ Financial support provided by the University of Missouri Research Board, but the Board is not responsible for the findings or comments reported here. This report is located at <http://www.truman.missouri.edu/ipp/Publications/briefs.html>

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